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for

CENTRAL NETWORK FOR VEHICLE DYNAMICS AND RIDE CONTROL SYSTEMS HAVING
DISTRIBUTED ELECTRONIC CONTROL UNITS

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**CONTROL NETWORK FOR VEHICLE DYNAMICS AND RIDE CONTROL
SYSTEMS HAVING DISTRIBUTED ELECTRONIC CONTROL UNITS**

Cross-Reference to Related Applications

[0001] This application is a continuation-in-part of U.S. Patent Application No. 10/612,178 filed July 3, 2003, which application is currently pending.

Field of the Invention

[0002] The present invention relates to control networks for vehicle dynamics and ride control systems in heavy vehicles.

Background of the Invention

[0003] Pneumatic vehicle dynamics control systems and ride control systems, such as brake systems and suspension systems, for heavy vehicles have been known and used for many years. Pressurized air has been used not only as the force to actuate components of such systems but also as the medium to convey control information to various system components.

[0004] More recently, control information has been transmitted to heavy vehicle dynamics control and ride control system components by electrical signals. Typically, a single task processor or electrical switch provides control information to a single type of component. The control information is generated according to

a scheme in response to sensor input of vehicle performance factors. Each system component includes an electrical actuator for receiving and interpreting the control signal to operate the pneumatic component.

[0005] A disadvantage of known systems is their complexity in terms of design, assembly, maintenance, and refurbishment. Factors increasing complexity include a high number of individual components, using pressurized air for both control information and application force, and conflicts between control strategies. These disadvantages are exacerbated by the proliferation of different types of control strategies. For example, inherent conflicts existing between antilock braking, traction, manual inputs/overrides, and other vehicle dynamics schemes can lead to "lost" or cycling braking systems creating a safety hazard.

Summary of the Invention

[0006] The invention provides an electrical control network laid over one or more vehicle dynamics control and/or ride control systems of a heavy vehicle, which control network controls actuation of components thereof. The invention offers many advantages including reduction of components, simplified design, unified communication for numerous different types of system components, simplified resolution of conflicts between competing control strategies, expandability to additional vehicle systems, and flexibility to upgrade for new, improved vehicle control schemes.

[0007] In one particular embodiment a brake system for a heavy vehicle includes a first type of brake component, a second type of brake component, at least one vehicle performance sensor, and a controller receiving sensor signals from the sensor and in electrical communication with the first and second types of brake components for actuation. A first control scheme is used by the controller for generating control signals for the first type of brake component, while a second control scheme is used by the controller for generating control signals for the second type of brake component.

[0008] Manual inputs may be provided for overriding control signals for the first and/or second type of brake component. Preferably, the controller prevents the first and second type of brake components from cycling. A source of pressurized air and/or a source of electrical energy is preferably provided for use in actuating at least one of the first and second type of brake components.

[0009] At least one of the first and second control schemes may be configured in a form selected from the group consisting of hardware, software, firmware, a pluggable module and combinations of these. The controller and at least one of the first and second control schemes may be connected by a data bus or by a control network, the controller and the sensor may be connected by a communication bus,

and the first and second types of brake component may be connected together in an application network.

[0010] In another embodiment, a brake system for a heavy vehicle includes a brake component, at least one vehicle performance sensor, and a controller receiving sensor signals from the sensor and in electrical communication with the brake component for actuation. A first control scheme is used by the controller for generating first control signals for the brake component, while a second control scheme is used by the controller for generating second control signals for the brake component. A conflict resolution scheme is used by the controller for resolving conflicts between the first and second control signals.

[0011] The conflict resolution scheme may be configured in a form selected from the group consisting of hardware, software, firmware, a pluggable module and combinations of these, and/or may comprise part of one or both of the first and second control schemes.

[0012] In another embodiment, a brake system for a heavy vehicle includes a first type of brake component, a second type of brake component, at least one vehicle performance sensor, a central control network for receiving sensor signals from the sensor and in electrical communication with the first and second type of brake components for transmitting control signals thereto, and a central supply network for

supplying energy to the first and second type of brake components for actuating the first and second type of brake components in response to the control signals received from the central control network.

[0013] The energy supplied by the central supply network may comprise, for example, pneumatic energy or electrical energy.

[0014] In still another embodiment, a control network for controlling vehicle dynamics and ride control systems in heavy vehicles includes a first type of vehicle dynamics and ride control system component, a second type of vehicle dynamics and ride control system component, at least one vehicle performance sensor, and a controller receiving sensor signals from the sensor and in electrical communication with the first and second type of vehicle dynamics and ride control system components for actuation. A first control scheme is used by the controller for generating first control signals for the first type of vehicle dynamics and ride control system component, while a second control scheme is used by the controller for generating control signals for the second type of vehicle dynamics and ride control system component.

[0015] The controller may also use a third control scheme for generating second control signals for the first type of vehicle dynamics and ride control system component. In this case, the control network preferably further includes a conflict

resolution scheme for resolving conflicts between the first and second control signals for the first type of vehicle dynamics and ride control system component. The first and second types of vehicle dynamics and ride control system components may, for example, be brake system components, suspension system components, traction control system components, steering system components, stability control system components, or combinations of these.

[0016] In yet another embodiment, a control network for controlling vehicle dynamics and ride control systems in heavy vehicles includes a vehicle dynamics and ride control system component, at least one vehicle performance sensor, and a controller receiving sensor signals from the sensor and in electrical communication with the vehicle dynamics and ride control system component for actuation. A first control scheme is used by the controller for generating first control signals for the vehicle dynamics and ride control system component, while a second control scheme is used by the controller for generating second control signals for the vehicle dynamics and ride control system component. A conflict resolution scheme is used by the controller for resolving conflicts between the first and second control signals.

[0017] In still yet another embodiment, a system for operating vehicle dynamics and ride control systems in heavy vehicles includes a first type of vehicle dynamics and ride control system component, a second type of vehicle dynamics and ride

control system component, at least one vehicle performance sensor, a central control network for receiving sensor signals from the sensor and in electrical communication with the first and second type of vehicle dynamics and ride control system components for transmitting control signals thereto, and a central supply network for supplying energy to the first and second type of vehicle dynamics and ride control system components for actuating the first and second type of vehicle dynamics and ride control system components in response to the control signals received from the central control network.

[0018] In still a further embodiment of the present invention, a brake system for a heavy vehicle includes a plurality of brake components and at least one vehicle performance sensor. A central control unit receives sensor signals from the at least one vehicle performance sensor and generates central control signals for controlling the plurality of brake components based on the received sensor signals. A distributed electronic control unit receives sensor signals from the at least one vehicle performance sensor and generating local control signals for controlling only some of the plurality of brake components based on the received sensor signals. A conflict resolution scheme resolves conflicts between the central control signals and the local control signals.

[0019] In some embodiments, the central control unit includes a first control scheme used by the central control unit for generating first central control signals, a

second control scheme used by the central control unit for generating second central control signals, and a central control unit conflict resolution scheme used by the central control unit for resolving conflicts between the first and second central control signals. In certain of these embodiments, the central control unit conflict resolution scheme comprises part of one or both of the first and second control schemes.

[0020] In some embodiments, the distributed electronic control unit includes a first control scheme used by the distributed electronic control unit for generating first local control signals, a second control scheme used by the distributed electronic control unit for generating second local control signals, and a distributed electronic control unit conflict resolution scheme used by the distributed electronic control unit for resolving conflicts between the first and second local control signals. In certain of these embodiments, the distributed electronic control unit conflict resolution scheme comprises part of one or both of the first and second control schemes.

[0021] In some embodiments, the system further includes a manual input for overriding the central control signals and the local control signals. In some embodiments, the system further includes a source of pressurized air for use in actuating the brake component and/or a source of electrical energy for use in actuating the brake component. In some embodiments, the conflict resolution

scheme is configured in a form selected from the group consisting of hardware, software, firmware, a pluggable module and combinations of these.

[0022] In still another embodiment of the present invention, a brake system for a heavy vehicle includes a first brake component comprising a first type of brake component, a second brake component comprising a second type of brake component, and at least one vehicle performance sensor. A central control unit receives sensor signals from the at least one vehicle performance sensor, a first control scheme is used by the central control unit for generating central control signals for controlling the first brake component, and a second control scheme is used by the central control unit for generating central control signals for controlling the second brake component. A distributed electronic control unit receives sensor signals from the at least one vehicle performance sensor and generates local control signals for controlling at least one of the first and second brake components.

[0023] In some embodiments, the system further includes a conflict resolution scheme for resolving conflicts between the central control signals and the local control signals. In certain of these embodiments, the conflict resolution scheme comprises part of one or both of the first and second control schemes. In certain of these embodiments, the conflict resolution scheme is configured in a form selected from the group consisting of hardware, software, firmware, a pluggable module and combinations of these. In some embodiments, the distributed electronic control unit

generates local control signals for controlling only one of the first and second brake components.

[0024] In some embodiments, the distributed electronic control unit includes a first control scheme used by the distributed electronic control unit for generating first local control signals, a second control scheme used by the distributed electronic control unit for generating second local control signals, and a distributed electronic control unit conflict resolution scheme used by the distributed electronic control unit for resolving conflicts between the first and second local control signals. In certain of these embodiments, the distributed electronic control unit conflict resolution scheme comprises part of one or both of the first and second control schemes.

[0025] In some embodiments, the system further includes a manual input for overriding the central control signals and the local control signals. In some embodiments, the system further includes a source of pressurized air for use in actuating the brake component and/or a source of electrical energy for use in actuating the brake component. In some embodiments, at least one of the first and second control schemes is configured in a form selected from the group consisting of hardware, software, firmware, a pluggable module and combinations of these.

[0026] In still yet a further embodiment of the present invention, a brake system for a heavy vehicle includes a plurality of brake components and at least one vehicle

performance sensor. A central control unit receives sensor signals from the at least one vehicle performance sensor and generates central control signals for controlling the plurality of brake components based on the received sensor signals. A distributed electronic control unit receives sensor signals from the at least one vehicle performance sensor and generates local control signals for controlling only some of the plurality of brake components based on the received sensor signals. A central supply network supplies energy to the plurality of brake components for actuating the plurality of brake components in response to the central and local control signals.

[0027] In some embodiments, the system further includes a conflict resolution scheme for resolving conflicts between the central control signals and the local control signals. In some embodiments, the central control unit includes a first control scheme used by the central control unit for generating first central control signals, a second control scheme used by the central control unit for generating second central control signals, and a central control unit conflict resolution scheme used by the central control unit for resolving conflicts between the first and second central control signals. In certain of these embodiments, the central control unit conflict resolution scheme comprises part of one or both of the first and second control schemes.

[0028] In some embodiments, the distributed electronic control unit includes a first control scheme used by the distributed electronic control unit for generating first local control signals, a second control scheme used by the distributed electronic control unit for generating second local control signals, and a distributed electronic control unit conflict resolution scheme used by the distributed electronic control unit for resolving conflicts between the first and second local control signals. In certain of these embodiments, the distributed electronic control unit conflict resolution scheme comprises part of one or both of the first and second control schemes.

[0029] In some embodiments, the system further includes a manual input for overriding the central control signals and the local control signals. In some embodiments, the central supply network comprises a source of pressurized air and/or a source of electrical energy.

[0030] The invention and its particular features and advantages will become more apparent from the following detailed description considered with reference to the accompanying drawings.

Brief Description of the Drawings

[0031] **Figure 1** is a block diagram schematically illustrating an embodiment of a system for operating vehicle dynamics and ride control systems in heavy vehicles in accordance with the present invention;

[0032] **Figure 2** is a flow diagram schematically illustrating operation of an embodiment of the system for operating vehicle dynamics and ride control systems in heavy vehicles of Figure 1;

[0033] **Figure 3** is an isometric partially schematic view of the embodiment of the system for operating vehicle dynamics and ride control systems in heavy vehicles of Figure 1;

[0034] **Figure 4** is a block diagram schematically illustrating another embodiment of a system for operating vehicle dynamics and ride control systems in heavy vehicles in accordance with the present invention; and

[0035] **Figure 5** is a flow diagram schematically illustrating operation of the embodiment of the system for operating vehicle dynamics and ride control systems in heavy vehicles of Figure 4.

Detailed Description of an Embodiment of the Invention

[0036] Referring first to Figures 1 and 2, a system 110 for operating vehicle dynamics and ride control systems in heavy vehicles in accordance with certain embodiments of the present invention is schematically shown. What is meant by "vehicle dynamics and ride control systems" is those systems of a vehicle which

are responsible for control of the vehicle's movement and its interaction with the road. Examples of such systems include the electronic brake system (EBS), the antilock brake system (ABS), the suspension system, the traction control system, the anti-slip regulation (ASR) system, the steering system, the stability control system, the electronic stability program (ESP), the adaptive cruise control (ACC) system, various components of the diagnostics system, the trailer interface, the transmission, the air management control system, the continuous brake retarder, etc. It should be noted that the term "vehicle dynamics and ride control systems" is intended to not include the powerplant (i.e., the engine and its various components).

[0037] System 110 includes a plurality of vehicle sensors 210 which detect and produce sensor signals 310 indicative of one or more operating parameters of the vehicle. Examples of such vehicle sensors 210 include wheel speed sensors, pitch sensors, vehicle height sensors, vehicle weight sensors, and may others. Because the signals 310 produced by sensors 210 may have one of a variety of different formats, a transducer or signal conditioner 212 may be provided for translating the format of the signals into a format useable by microprocessor 114. Also, because a plurality of signals 310 may be transmitted simultaneously by sensors 210, a sensor signal multiplexor 214 may be provided for avoiding conflicts between sensor signals 310. The conditioned and multiplexed signals 310 are transmitted to microprocessor 114.

[0038] Once microprocessor 114 receives the sensor signals, microprocessor 114 queries actuator control modules 116 to determine what action, if any, should be taken by each vehicle actuator 126. To this end, each of actuator control modules 116 contains thereon an actuator control scheme 312 which comprises at least one, and preferably a plurality of, rules concerning actuation of actuators 126 in response to various sensor signals 310. Actuator control modules 116 may be associated with a particular type of individual actuator 126 (e.g., service brakes, emergency brakes, trailer height adjustment, etc.), with a type of vehicle system (e.g., brake system, suspension system, etc.), or with a subsystem of a vehicle system (e.g., anti-lock braking system, shock-absorbing system, etc.).

[0039] A safety and customization module 120 may be provided which includes thereon a safety and/or customization scheme. A safety scheme 314 may include, for example, one or more rules which are directed to safety requirements imposed by a governmental body or the like. This allows for mandated rules to be incorporated into the overall control scheme without requiring that the actuator control modules 116 themselves be adapted for various jurisdictions. For example, if the same system 110 were desired to be used in both Great Britain and the United States (which countries have different safety rules), system 110 would require only that the safety and customization module 120 be replaced, while allowing all of the remaining modules to be used in both countries. The

customization scheme 316 may include one or more rules which are directed to a particular user's preferences. This allows for preferences to be incorporated into the overall control scheme without requiring that the actuator control modules 116 themselves be adapted for different users. The customization scheme 316 may be adapted on a larger scale, for example for different vehicle manufacturers, or on a smaller scale, for example for a particular company (e.g., United Parcel Service or the like).

[0040] It is contemplated that microprocessor's 114 query of actuator control modules 116 and safety and customization module 120 (if provided) may return conflicting rules from the various schemes concerning how to respond to the situation reported by sensors 210. These conflicts are resolved by microprocessor 114 based upon a conflict control scheme 318 which is stored on conflict control module 118, which conflict control scheme 318 contains one or more rules concerning how to resolve conflicts between other rules. These conflict control rules may be absolute (e.g., "Safety scheme rules are always given priority over actuator control scheme rules."), or may depend upon sensed conditions of the vehicle (e.g., "When condition A is sensed, the rule contained in actuator control scheme X is given priority over the rule contained in actuator control scheme Y."). Of course, conflict control rules may be significantly more complicated in order to resolve potential conflicts between a number of actuator control schemes faced with a number of sensed conditions. Although it is

preferred in some embodiments for conflict control scheme 318 to be stored on a separate conflict control module 118, it should be understood that such need not be the case. Rather, conflict control scheme may be stored on one or more of actuator control modules 116, either in whole on a single module or split up on various modules.

[0041] Thus conflict rules help resolve conflicts at the control level. With such a system, for example, inherent conflicts existing between antilock braking, traction, manual inputs/overrides, and other vehicle dynamics schemes no longer lead to “lost” or cycling braking systems creating a safety hazard.

[0042] Once any conflicts are resolved, microprocessor 114 generates any necessary actuator control signals 320 and transmits such signals 320 to vehicle actuators 126. For each of use and replaceability of system components, in certain embodiments actuator control signals 320 generated and transmitted by microprocessor 114 may be in a standard format. When such is the case, each of actuators 126 may include a driver 216 for converting standard to specific control signals (indicated by reference numeral 322). This specific control signal is then used to generate an actuation signal (indicated by reference numeral 324) for causing actuators 126 to perform the requested function.

[0043] Actuators 126 are associated with various components of a vehicle's vehicle dynamics and ride control systems, such as the brake system, the suspension system, the traction control system, the steering system, the stability control system, etc. Actuators 126 may be associated with different types of components within the same system or with components in different systems. For example, actuators 126 may be associated with two different types of brake system components or may be associated with a brake system component and a suspension system component. In some embodiments, only one type of actuator 126 is controlled.

[0044] The components with which actuators 126 are associated are in communication with some type of energy supply 218 for supplying power 220 for operating the components. Energy supply 218 may comprise, for example, a pressurized air reservoir or a battery for supplying power 220 in the form of pneumatic power or electrical power respectively. In certain embodiments, the same centralized energy supply 218 supplies power 220 to all components centrally controlled by system 110. In other embodiments, various components centrally controlled by system 110 may be supplied power by various supplies of energy.

[0045] System 110 may allow microprocessor 114 to control operation of sensors 210 via a sensor adjustment and calibration signal 222 or the like. For example. Under certain conditions it may be desirable for vehicle sensors 210 to provide more detailed data than is typically provided or to provide data more or less often than is typical.

[0046] System 110 may include the ability to receive manual input and/or override commands 224 from the vehicle operator in order to manually control vehicle actuators 126 and/or override commands issued by microprocessor 114. Such manual input and/or override commands 224 may be fed to microprocessor 114 for transmission thereby to actuators 126 (in which case such commands may or may not be subject to conflict review), or may be fed directly to actuators 126 without passing through microprocessor.

[0047] Microprocessor 114 and the various modules may be connected, for example, by a data bus or by a control network. Microprocessor 114 and sensors 210 may be connected, for example, by a communication bus, and the of brake components and/or their actuators 126 may be connected together, for example, in an application network. When microprocessor 114 and actuators 126 are connected by a network or the like, actuator control modules 116 may have stored thereon for transmission to microprocessor the address 326 of the actuator on the network.

[0048] Referring now to Figure 3, one particular exemplary embodiment of system 110 is shown. In this embodiment, various components of system 110 are shown as hardware components. However, it should be understood that this is not strictly required, and the various components could comprise hardware, software, firmware, combinations of these, or may take numerous other forms.

[0049] In the embodiment shown in Figure 3, system 110 includes a housing 112 in which various components thereof are contained. Within housing 112 is a microprocessor 114 which controls various functions of system 110 as described in more detail below. Also contained within housing 112 are a variety of modules, such as actuator control modules 116, conflict control module 118, and safety and customization module 120. Other types of modules are also possible.

[0050] A plurality of sockets 122 are provided within housing 112, each of sockets 122 adapted to receive a module and place the modules in communication with microprocessor 114. Because of this socket arrangement, each of the modules is easily installable, removable and swappable. Thus, as components of system 110 are added, removed or replaced, the module or modules corresponding to that component may be added, removed or replaced. Moreover, modules may be easily replaced when control schemes contained on

the modules is desired to be modified or updated. Preferably, as shown in Figure 3, the number of sockets 122 provided is greater than the number of modules originally provided to allow for convenient expansion of system 110 as new components are added.

[0051] Housing 112 also includes, preferably on an outer surface thereof, a plurality of sensor input ports 124 and a plurality of actuator output ports (not shown). Actuator output ports are provided to connect the electronics contained within housing 112 to at least one, and preferably a plurality of, vehicle dynamics and ride control system components, each of which includes an actuator for performing some action relating to one or more of a vehicle's vehicle dynamics and ride control systems. Sensor input ports 124 are provided to connect the electronics contained within housing 112 to a plurality of vehicle sensors which detect and produce a signal indicative of one or more operating parameters of the vehicle. Examples of such vehicle sensors include wheel speed sensors, pitch sensors, vehicle height sensors, vehicle weight sensors, and many others.

[0052] Housing 112 also includes, preferably on an outer surface thereof, at least one manual input or override port which allows for connection of an input device which may be used to override microprocessor's 114 control of actuators 126 if desired by the vehicle's operator, as discussed more fully below. A cover (not

shown) is preferably provided to close housing 112 such that the electronics contained therein are protected.

[0053] Referring now to Figures 4 and 5, a system 410 for operating vehicle dynamics and ride control systems in heavy vehicles in accordance with certain other embodiments of the present invention is schematically shown. A central controller portion of system 410 operates in certain respects like system 110 illustrated in Figures 1 and 2. However, in addition to a central controller 412, system 410 also includes distributed electronic control units 414 which control only one vehicle actuator 126 or a subset of vehicle actuators 126 (e.g. a pair of actuators on a single vehicle axle), rather than controlling all vehicle actuators 126. This allows certain functions of vehicle actuators 126 which do not affect operation of others of vehicle actuators 126 to be controlled locally by distributed electronic control units 414, while reserving control by central controller 412 only for those circumstances where coordination of multiple vehicle actuators 126 is required. Such localized distributed control provides several advantages over completely centralized control, including quicker response times (e.g., due to shorter electrical signal travel and reduced processing by the central controller) and more reliable system operation (e.g., due to system redundancy).

[0054] System 410 includes a plurality of vehicle sensors 210 which detect and produce sensor signals 310 indicative of one or more operating parameters of the

vehicle. Examples of such vehicle sensors 210 include wheel speed sensors, pitch sensors, vehicle height sensors, vehicle weight sensors, and many others. Sensor signals 310 are processed in central controller 412 as described above in connection with Figures 1 and 2 in order to generate control signals 510.

[0055] Sensor signals are also transmitted to distributed electronic control units 414. Because the signals 310 produced by sensors 210 may have one of a variety of different formats, distributed electronic control units 414 include a transducer or signal conditioner 416 for translating the format of the signals into a format useable by microprocessor 418 of distributed electronic control units 414. Also, because a plurality of signals 310 may be transmitted simultaneously by sensors 210, distributed electronic control units 414 may include a sensor signal multiplexor 420 for avoiding conflicts between sensor signals 310. The conditioned and multiplexed signals 512 are transmitted to microprocessor 418 of distributed electronic control units 414.

[0056] Once microprocessor 418 receives the sensor signals 512, microprocessor 418 queries actuator control module 422 to determine what action, if any, should be taken by each vehicle actuator 126. To this end, actuator control module 422 contains thereon an actuator control scheme 514 which comprises at least one, and preferably a plurality of, rules concerning actuation of

actuators 126 in response to various sensor signals 510. Actuator control module 422 may be associated with a particular type of individual actuator 126 (e.g., service brakes, emergency brakes, trailer height adjustment, etc.), with a type of vehicle system (e.g., brake system, suspension system, etc.), or with a subsystem of a vehicle system (e.g., anti-lock braking system, shock-absorbing system, etc.).

[0057] A safety and customization module 516 may be provided which includes thereon a safety and/or customization scheme. A safety scheme 518 may include, for example, one or more rules which are directed to safety requirements imposed by a governmental body or the like. This allows for mandated rules to be incorporated into the overall control scheme without requiring that the actuator control module 422 itself be adapted for various jurisdictions. For example, if the same system 410 were desired to be used in both Great Britain and the United States (which countries have different safety rules), system 410 would require only that the safety and customization module 422 be replaced, while allowing all of the remaining modules to be used in both countries. The customization scheme 520 may include one or more rules which are directed to a particular user's preferences. This allows for preferences to be incorporated into the overall control scheme without requiring that the actuator control module 422 itself be adapted for different users. The customization scheme 520 may be adapted on a larger scale, for example for different vehicle manufacturers, or on a smaller scale, for example for a particular company (e.g., United Parcel Service or the like).

[0058] It is contemplated that microprocessor's 418 query of actuator control module 422 and safety and customization module 516 (if provided) may return conflicting rules from the various schemes concerning how to respond to the situation reported by sensors 210. These conflicts are resolved by microprocessor 418 based upon a conflict control scheme 522 which is stored on a conflict control module 424, which conflict control scheme 522 contains one or more rules concerning how to resolve conflicts between other rules in a manner similar to that described above in connection with conflict control scheme 318. Once any conflicts are resolved, microprocessor 418 generates any necessary actuation signals 524 and transmits such signals 524 to vehicle actuators 126.

[0059] By providing distributed electronic control units 414 with their own microprocessors 418, certain functions of vehicle actuators 126 which do not affect operation of others of vehicle actuators 126 to be controlled locally by distributed electronic control units 414, while reserving control by central controller 412 only for those circumstances where coordination of multiple vehicle actuators 126 is required. Thus, in some cases, it may be desired that particular functions of actuators 126 be controlled completely locally, in which cases actuation signals 524 are based solely on sensor signals 512. In other cases it may be desired that particular functions of actuators 126 be controlled solely by central controller 412, in which cases, actuation signals 524 are based solely on control signal 510

received from central controller 412. In still other cases, it may be desired that particular functions of actuators 126 be controlled by both distributed electronic control units 414 and central controller 412. In these cases, actuation signals 524 are based on both control signal 510 received from central controller 412 and sensor signals 512. Any conflicts between control signal 510 received from central controller 412 and control signals generated by microprocessor 418 may be resolved according to conflict control scheme 522.

[0060] System 410 may allow microprocessor 418 to control operation of sensors 210 via a sensor adjustment and calibration signal 426 or the like. For example. Under certain conditions it may be desirable for vehicle sensors 210 to provide more detailed data than is typically provided or to provide data more or less often than is typical.

[0061] System 410 may include the ability to receive manual input and/or override commands 224 from the vehicle operator in order to manually control vehicle actuators 126 and/or override commands issued by microprocessor 418. Such manual input and/or override commands 224 may be fed to microprocessor 114 for transmission thereby to actuators 126 (in which case such commands may or may not be subject to conflict review), or may be fed directly to actuators 126 without passing through microprocessor 418.

[0062] Microprocessor 418 and the various modules may be connected, for example, by a data bus or by a control network. Microprocessor 418 and sensors 210 may be connected, for example, by a communication bus.

[0063] Although the invention has been described with reference to a particular arrangement of parts, features and the like, these are not intended to exhaust all possible arrangements or features, and indeed many other modifications and variations will be ascertainable to those of skill in the art.